



UNITED PHILANTHROPY
FORUM

A network for the common good

**Strengthening Philanthropy's
Capacity to Engage in Policy:**
Progress Report on
United Philanthropy
Forum's PolicyWorks
Initiative

September 2018

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The report can be downloaded from the Forum's website at:

www.unitedphilforum.org/policyworksreport2018

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About the Forum

United Philanthropy Forum leads, strengthens and informs a national network of nearly 75 regional and national philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs) that advance philanthropy's impact for the common good. We envision a courageous philanthropic sector that catalyzes a just and equitable society where all can participate and prosper.

Forum members represent more than 7,000 philanthropic organizations, making us the largest network serving philanthropy in America. The Forum is creating a new kind of philanthropic network that brings together regional PSOs' deep regional roots and connections with national PSOs' deep content knowledge and reach. Given our network's scale and scope, we can lead change and increase impact in philanthropy in a deeper and broader way than any other organization.

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Key Findings

Nine years ago, Philanthropy Ohio and the Council of Michigan Foundations started a new capacity-building initiative, with four other participating regional philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs), to prepare regional PSOs for individual, collaborative and collective policy work at the local, state and federal levels. They managed the initiative, called PolicyWorks for Philanthropy, through three years of growing success, after which it was managed by United Philanthropy Forum (then called the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers). Through PolicyWorks, the Forum provides its regional PSO members (and now increasingly its national PSO members) with a wide range of support, including peer learning and sharing, policy-focused webinars, an annual PolicyWorks Institute, an annual policy capacity assessment and profile, and much more. This report highlights key areas of progress for PolicyWorks during its first nine years, based on the responses of 32 regional PSOs.

The capacity of regional PSOs to support and conduct policy work has improved dramatically since 2009

- The share of regional PSOs allocating some staff time to focus on policy work (either part-time or full-time) increased from 45% in 2009 to 84% in 2017.
- Most regional PSOs (87%) now facilitate relationship-building between their philanthropy members and local or state policymakers, up from 43% in 2009.
- Only a third of regional PSOs (35%) provided resources and tools to help their members effectively engage with policymakers in 2009, compared to 71% in 2017.
- Less than a quarter of regional PSOs (21%) provided educational briefings directly to policymakers about timely public policy issues in 2009, but 68% reported doing this in 2017.

Growth of Regional PSOs on Key Policy Capacity Indicators, 2009–2017

	2009	2017	Change
	% of regional PSOs		
Allocate some staff time to policy	45%	84%	+39%
Facilitate relationships with policymakers	43%	87%	+44%
Provide policy resources & tools to members	35%	71%	+36%
Provide briefings to policymakers	21%	68%	+47%

Regional PSOs continued to grow their capacity to engage in public policy in the past year, and cite the Forum as helping support this growth

- Most regional PSOs (83%) said they improved their understanding of current trends related to policy issues in 2017, and 96% of these PSOs reported that the activities and resources provided by the Forum directly (68%) or indirectly (28%) supported this change.
- Nearly all regional PSOs (94%) increased the flow of policy information to their members last year, with 82% of these PSOs reporting that this was supported by the Forum either directly (50%) or indirectly (32%).
- Nearly three-quarters of regional PSOs (71%) conducted education and outreach activities with their members in 2017 to raise awareness about how and why grantmakers should help to ensure an accurate census count, and 96% of these PSOs said the Forum supported these efforts directly (68%) or indirectly (28%).

Areas of Regional PSOs' Policy Activity Growth in 2017

	% of regional PSOs saying they engaged more in this activity in 2017	% of these regional PSOs saying Forum supported this change
Improved understanding of current policy trends	83%	96%
Increased flow of policy info to members	94%	82%
Engaged more in 2020 census activities	71%	96%

Regional PSOs are increasingly making strategic decisions related to staffing and financial management to improve the sustainability of their policy work

- The share of regional PSOs reporting that their staff had the right mix of skills and expertise to achieve the current policy work objectives increased from 45% in 2016 to 56% in 2017.
- Similarly, more PSOs reported that the allocation of staff time for policy work is clear and adequate to achieve their policy work objectives, from 29% in 2016 to 44% in 2017.
- About a third (35%) reported that adequate budget was assigned to support the achievement of current policy work objectives and that the performance against the budget is regularly monitored, up from 23% in 2016.

Areas of Regional PSOs' Policy Capacity Growth in 2017

	2016	2017	Change
	% of regional PSOs		
Staff have right mix of skills & expertise to achieve policy objectives	45%	56%	+11%
Allocation of staff time for policy work is clear & adequate to achieve policy objectives	29%	44%	+15%
Adequate budget to achieve policy objectives	23%	35%	+12%



Georgia delegation meeting with Congressman John Lewis during Foundations on the Hill 2018

Introduction

Policy work is a core focus for United Philanthropy Forum. This includes government relations dealing with legislation and regulations affecting the work of charitable foundations, advocacy on critical issues for philanthropy, and public policy engagement to support the achievement of grantmaking goals. An important vehicle for advancing this work has been the PolicyWorks for Philanthropy initiative. PolicyWorks started as a network collaboration among 20 regional philanthropy serving organizations (PSOs) in 2010 and became a formal initiative of the Forum in 2014 open to all Forum members.

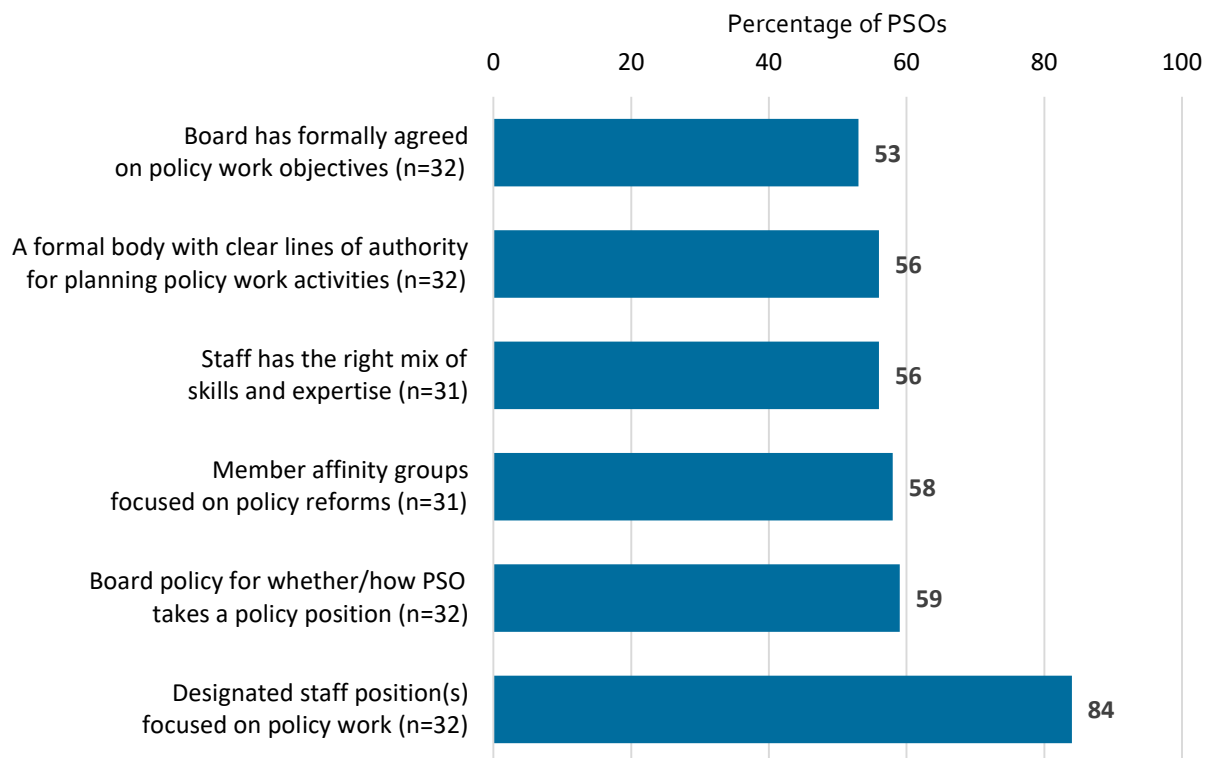
As part of the PolicyWorks initiative, a survey on policy work has been conducted each year to explore the capacity and activities of regional PSOs. The survey was first completed by 31 PSOs in 2009 to provide a baseline. Although the specific questions and responding organizations have evolved over the 2009-2017 period, the data provide a useful snapshot of the current landscape and highlight trends regarding how the capacity of PSOs for conducting and supporting policy work is changing across the network.

The annual survey on policy work was last conducted in late November and December of 2017, with 32 regional PSOs responding. This summary report describes the infrastructure and practices currently in place at regional organizations, the ways in which the Forum has directly helped to build capacity and support policy engagement over the past year, and notable changes and emerging trends identified through cross-year comparison. The final section examines the challenges and opportunities facing the network for achieving the long-term vision of PSOs engaging effectively in individual, collaborative and collective policy work at the local, state and federal levels to help solve community problems.

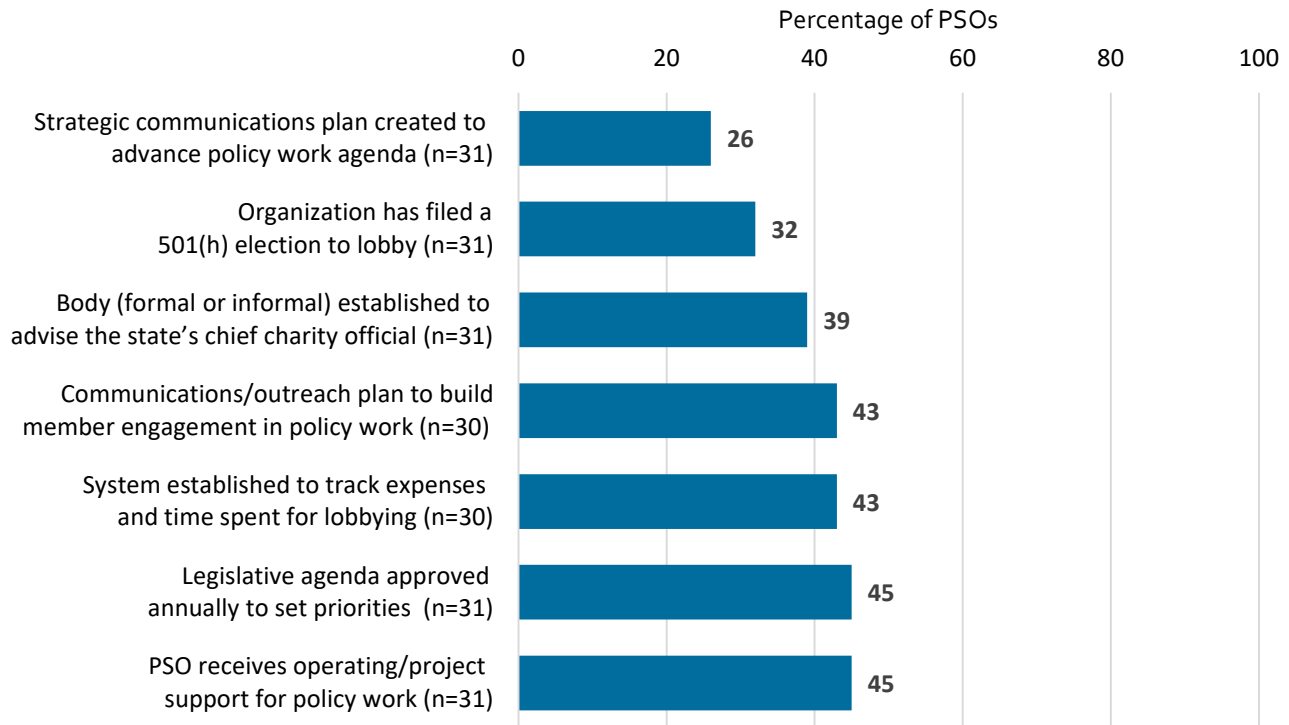
The Infrastructure for Policy Work at Regional PSOs

Most regional PSOs have established some formal structures and systems for supporting and conducting policy work. These core infrastructure components reported by more than half the responding PSOs in 2017 are shown in Figure 1. Three-quarters (75%) have objectives related to policy work, and more than half (56%) have objectives that were formally reviewed and approved by the PSO's board. Most (84%) have formally allocated at least some staff time to policy work, and more than half (56%) also noted that their staff have the right mix of skills and expertise for achieving the PSO's policy work objectives.

Other policy infrastructure components commonly in place at regional PSOs include having a board policy determining whether and how the organization would take a public position on a policy issue (59%), having at least one member affinity group focused on achieving a policy reform (58%), and having a public policy committee or other formal body with authority for planning and decision-making (56%).

**Figure 1. Common Infrastructure for Policy Work at Regional PSOs**

Fewer than half of the organizations reported approving a legislative agenda annually to set priorities for engaging in public policy or government relations. As shown in Figure 2, other processes and resources that were less common at the regional PSOs included receiving operating or project support for policy work (45%), having a system for tracking expenses and time spent for lobbying (43%), and having a body established to advise the state's Attorney General and/or chief charity official (39%). About a third of the PSOs (32%) have filed a 501(h) election to lobby and fewer than a quarter (23%) have a staff person who is a registered lobbyist (state or federal).

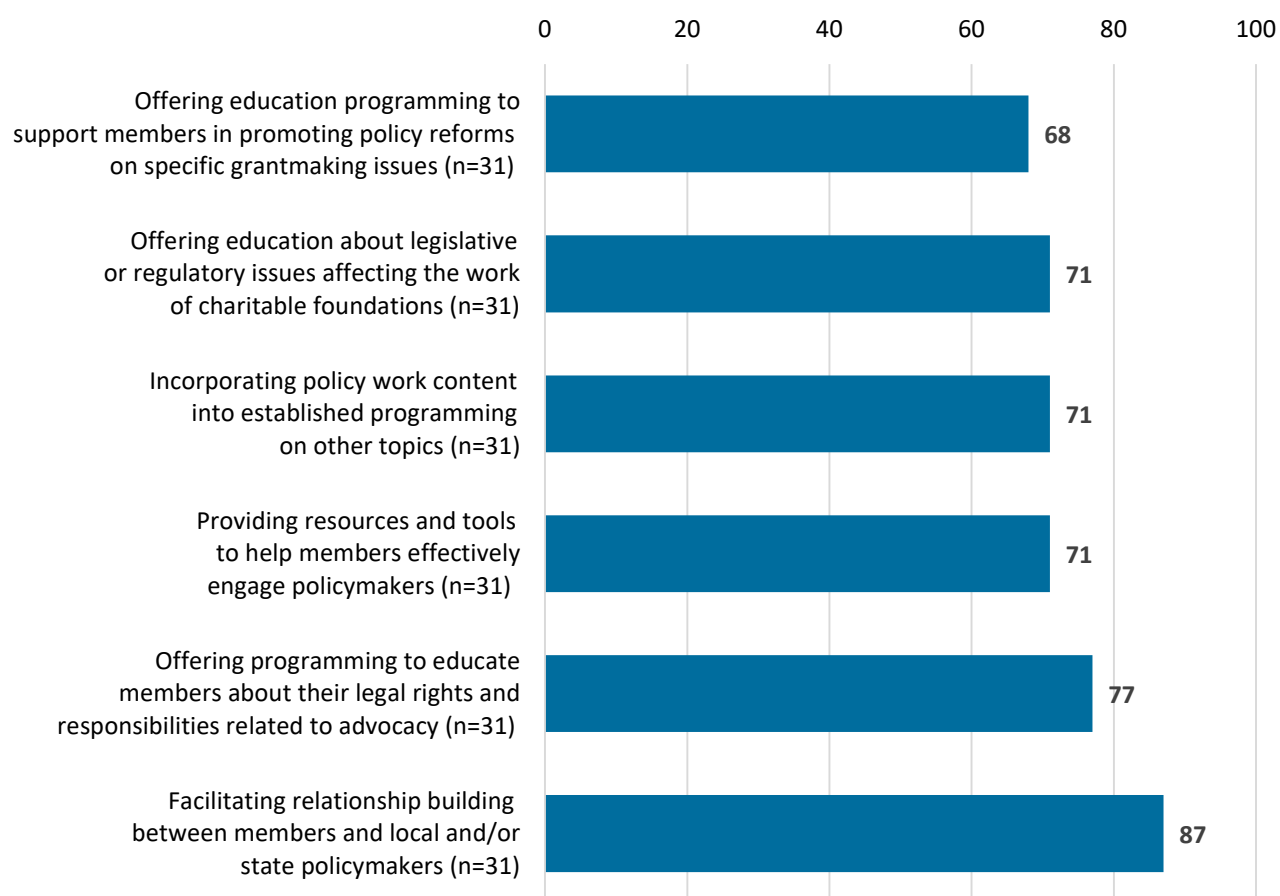
Figure 2. Less Common Infrastructure for Policy Work at Regional PSOs


Strategic communications tend to focus first on building member engagement in policy work. Nearly half of the PSOs (43%) reported having an outreach plan for increasing member engagement, but only a quarter (26%) had a strategic communications plan designed to achieve policy reforms or advance their policy work agenda.

Activities and Services for Members of Regional PSOs

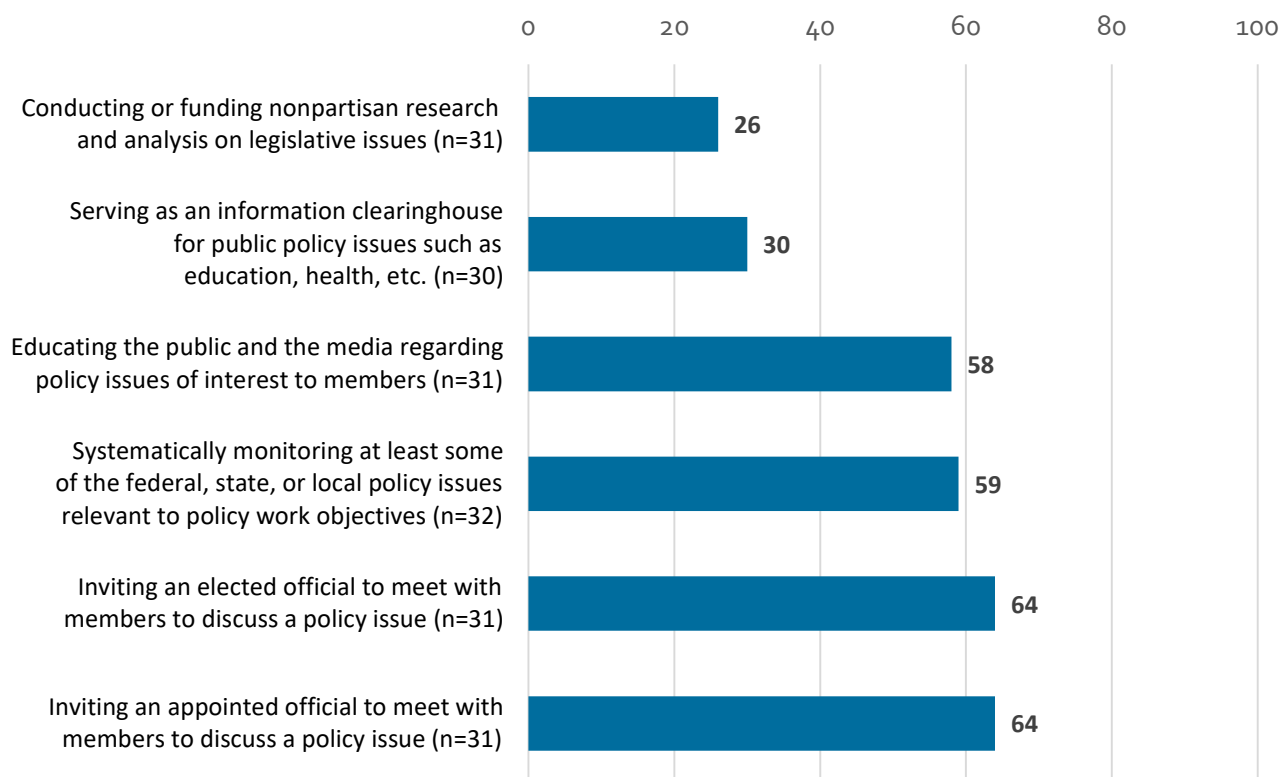
Regional PSOs provide a broad range of educational programs and services for their members related to policy engagement and government relations. Most of the organizations (87%) work to facilitate relationship building between their members and local or state policymakers. More than three-quarters (77%) offer programming to educate members about their legal rights and responsibilities related to advocacy, and nearly as many (71%) provide education about legislative or regulatory issues affecting the philanthropic sector. These and other services most commonly provided for members are in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Most Common Services Provided by PSOs for Their Members



Regional PSOs actively encourage and prepare their members to conduct policy work. This includes providing resources and tools to help members engage policymakers and incorporating policy work content into established programming on other topics (both 71%). As shown in Figure 4, nearly two thirds (64%) of the responding PSOs invited an appointed or elected official in 2017 to meet with their members to discuss a policy issue. A majority of organizations also systematically monitor policy issues relevant for their policy work objectives (59%) and educate the public and the media regarding policy issues of interest to members (58%). Relatively few regional PSOs serve as information clearinghouses for public policy issues (30%) or conduct or fund nonpartisan research and analysis on legislative issues (26%).

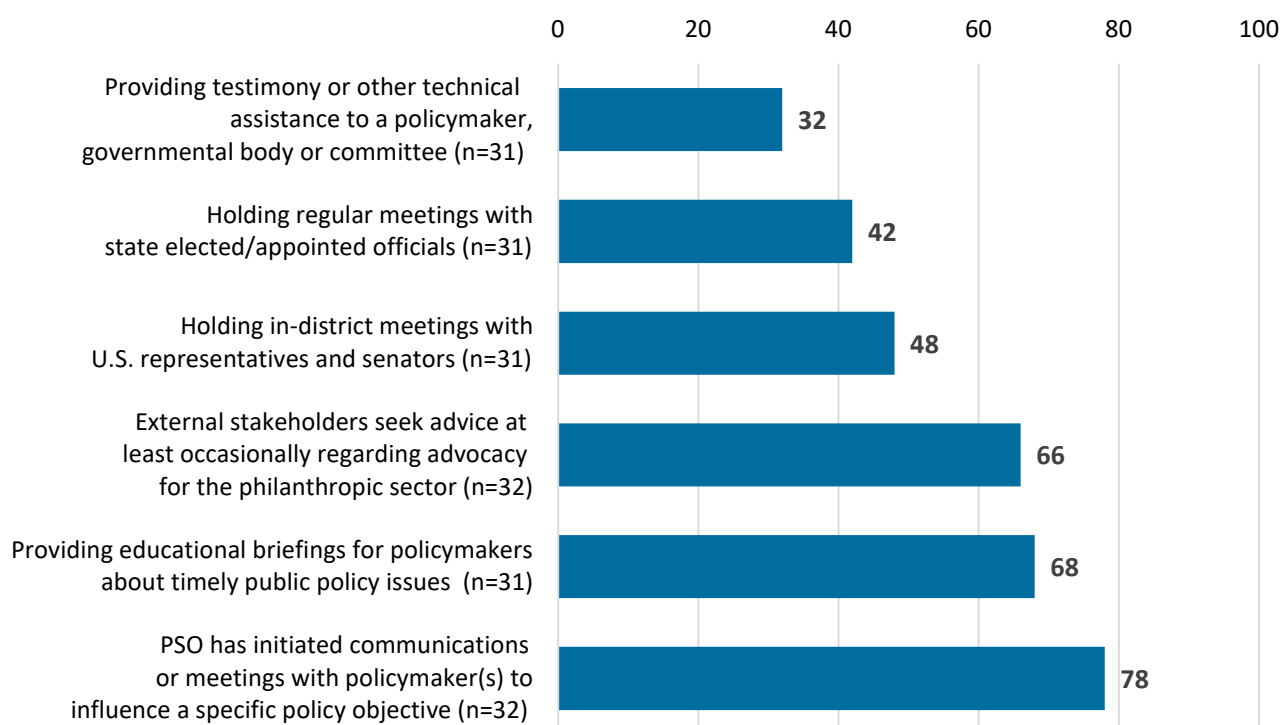
Figure 4. Other Common Services Provided by PSOs for Their Members



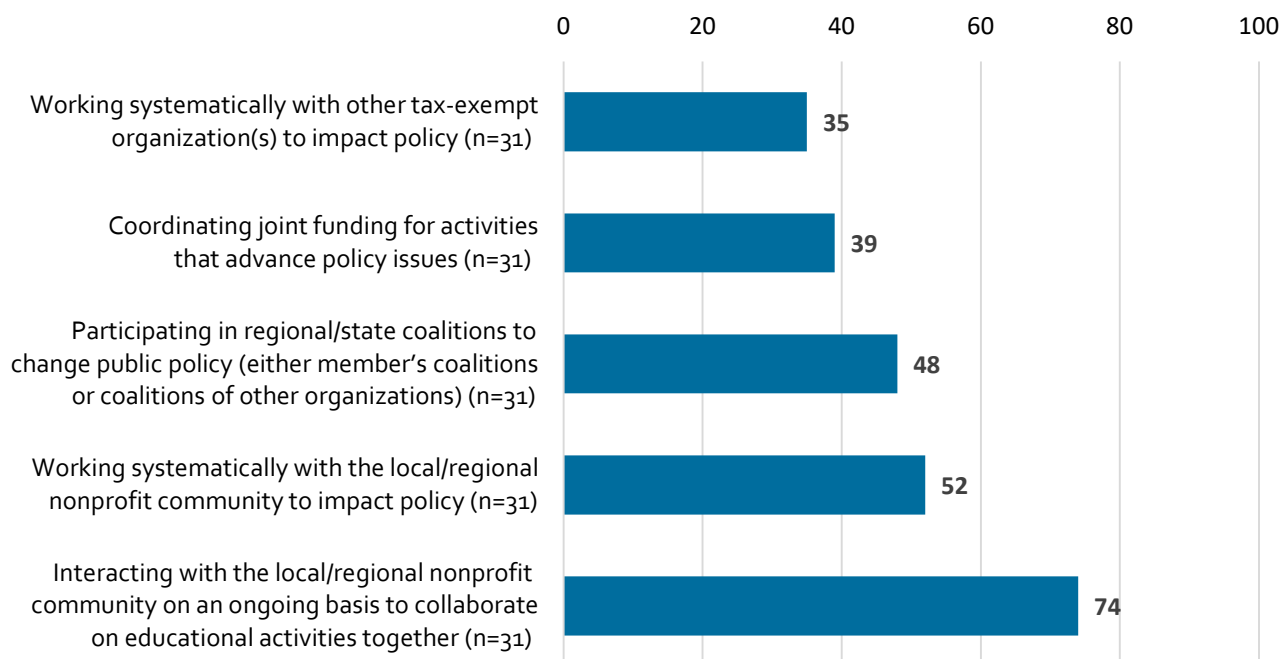
External Relations

Most regional PSOs are directly engaging policymakers. More than three-quarters (78%) of regional PSOs communicated or met with one or more policymaker(s) in 2017 to influence a specific policy work objective. Two-thirds (66%) have some visibility as an advocate for the philanthropic sector, reporting that “external stakeholders occasionally seek help/advice from the PSO regarding a policy issue.” As shown in Figure 5, nearly half of the PSOs also reported holding in-district meetings with U.S. representatives and senators (48%) and holding regular meetings with state elected or appointed officials (42%).

Figure 5. Ways that Regional Organizations Engage Policymakers



PSOs are collaborating with other organizations and pursuing collective action. As shown in Figure 6, three-quarters (74%) of regional PSOs interacted with the local/regional nonprofit community on an ongoing basis to collaborate on policy-related educational events or other activities, and half (52%) worked systematically with the local/regional nonprofit community to impact policy. Nearly half (48%) participated in regional or state coalitions to change public policy, and more than a third (39%) coordinated joint funding for activities to advance policy issues.

Figure 6. Ways that PSOs Support Collaborative and Collective Policy Work


Recent Changes in PSOs' Policy Work Supported by United Philanthropy Forum

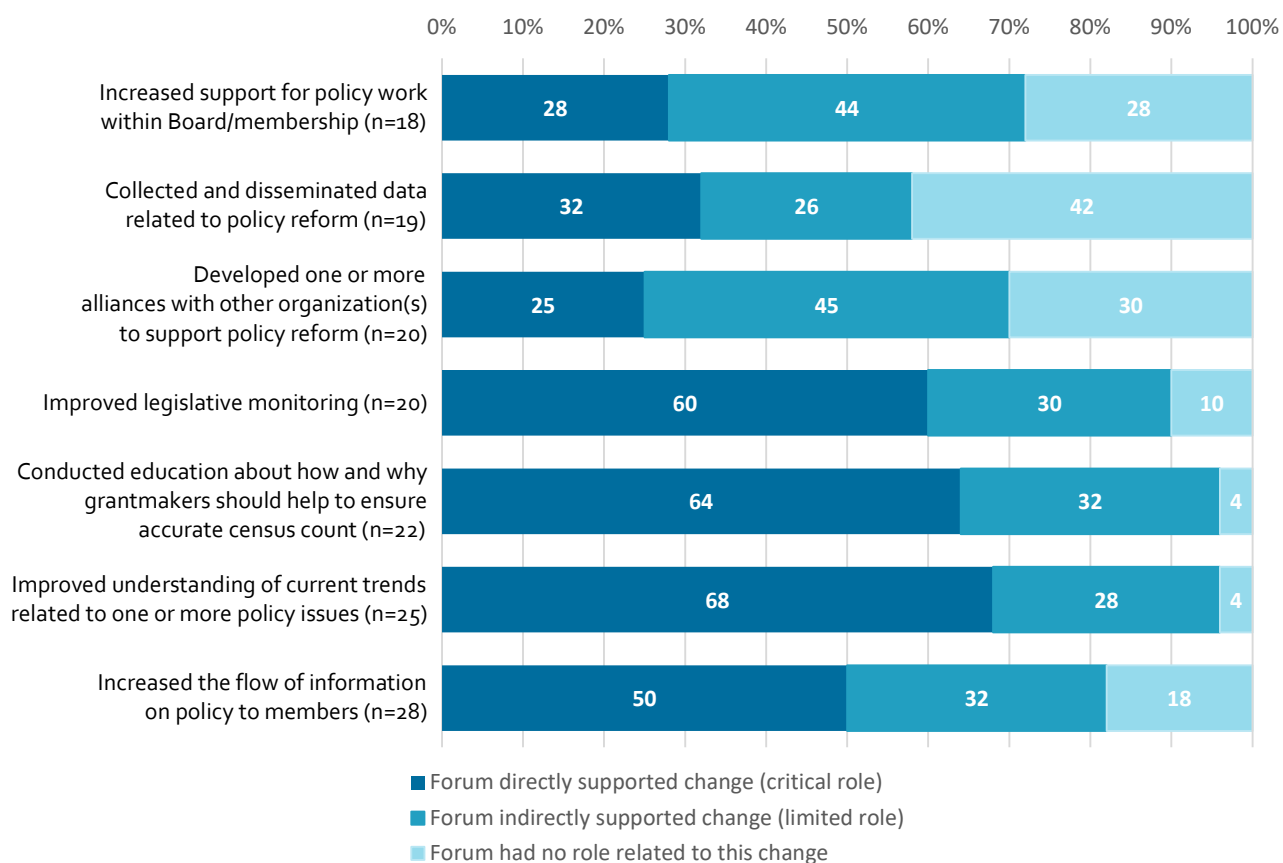
The networking opportunities, activities, and resources provided by the Forum have helped regional PSOs to achieve key results. The annual survey asked respondents to identify changes their organizations made in 2017 related to advocacy and policy work and to indicate the extent to which the Forum directly helped to cause this change.¹ As shown in Figure 7, the Forum was particularly effective in activities related to education and communication. Nearly all of the regional PSOs (28 of 31 or 90%) increased the flow of information on policy that they provide to their members in 2017, with 82% of these PSOs reporting that the Forum supported this change directly (50%) or indirectly (32%). In addition, most regional PSOs (25 of 31) improved their understanding of current trends related to policy issues in 2017 compared to 2016. Of these regional PSOs, more than two-thirds (68%) reported that the Forum directly supported this change and nearly all others (28%) reported that the Forum indirectly supported this change.

¹ The four response options for each item included: Forum had no role related to this change, Forum indirectly supported change (limited role), Forum directly supported change (critical role), and NA-change did not occur in 2017.

The Forum was instrumental in helping regional PSOs engage in activities to help ensure a fair and accurate census count in 2020. More than 70% (22 of 31) of the regional PSOs reported that they increased their efforts in 2017 to conduct education about how and why grantmakers can help ensure a fair and accurate census count, and nearly all of these PSOs (96%) reported that the Forum directly (64%) or indirectly (32%) supported their census activities. In addition, five PSOs reported that the Forum played a critical role in getting them to conduct or promote outreach to tribal, state and local governments to participate in the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA). Two others (6%) also reported this change for 2017 with indirect support from the Forum.

The Forum also helped regional PSOs to improve their legislative monitoring. Of the 20 regional PSOs that indicated an increase in their legislative monitoring activity in 2017 compared to 2016, nearly two-thirds (60%) reported that the Forum contributed to this change directly, and most of the remaining ones (30%) indicated that the Forum's resources and activities provided some indirect support.

Figure 7. Role of the Forum for Most Commonly Reported Outcomes and Changes at PSOs in 2017*



*Respondents could also select "N/A—did not occur in 2017." Each bar in graph reflects those PSOs that reported that the change occurred in 2017. Items are listed from most common (n=28) to less common (n=18). Types of changes reported at fewer than 18 PSOs are not included here

Emerging Trends

The diversity of regional PSOs, evolving data collection, and dynamic exogenous variables all make it difficult to identify long-term trends. Notable complications for tracing patterns in the PolicyWorks data since 2009 include:

- After the baseline data collection in 2009 (n=31), the PolicyWorks community was restricted to 20 participating organizations for 2010 and 2011 and then opened to eight additional PSOs in 2012. PolicyWorks became an initiative of the Forum open to all network members in 2013. This means that there is some response bias in the data from 2010 until 2013 given that participating organizations tended to have increased interest and engagement in policy work.
- In the early years, there was a clear need to develop a common language related to public policy engagement and government relations. Fluctuations in the responses to the inventory of services and practices sometimes reflected an improved understanding of the definitions rather than any change in activity or capacity at a responding organization.
- Plans to build the capacity for policy work at regional PSOs were affected to varying degrees by national and local economic downturns and other external factors.

Nonetheless, the dataset highlights major shifts over the past nine years and provides a comprehensive understanding of how regional PSOs in the Forum's network have developed capacity and engaged in policy work since 2013.²

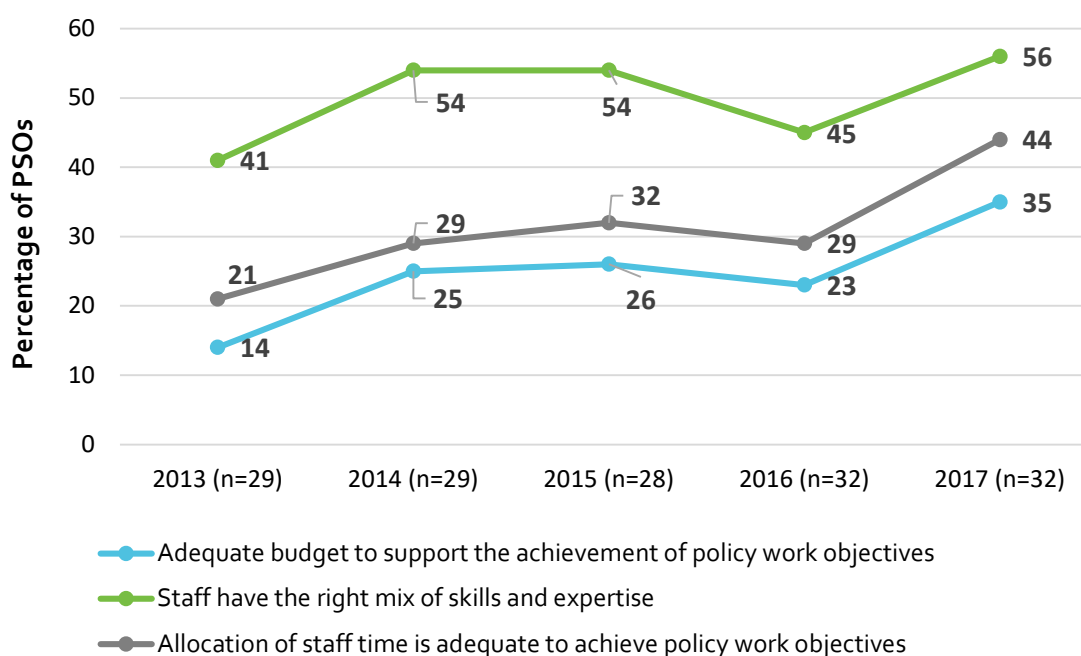
Changes since the baseline in 2009 underscore how policy work has become a core function for many regional organizations. Notable shifts are reflected by the following:

- Many more regional PSOs formally allocate at least some staff time (either full- or part-time) to focus on policy work. This increased from 45% in 2009 to 84% in 2017.
- More regional PSOs are actively working to help their members engage policymakers.
 - Most now facilitate relationship building between members and local and/or state policymakers. This increased from 43% in 2009 to 87% in 2017.
 - More also provide resources and tools to help their members effectively engage policymakers. This increased from 35% in 2009 to 71% in 2017.
- More regional PSOs are also providing educational briefings directly to policymakers about timely public policy issues. This increased from 21% in 2009 to 68% in 2017.

² Comparisons across years are not based on a matched pair analysis and the number and mix of responding PSOs varies across years.

More regional PSOs are making strategic decisions related to staffing and financial management to improve the sustainability of their policy work. Since 2013, there has been an increased focus among PSOs on dedicating an adequate budget for policy work, allocating enough staff time to achieve the PSO's policy work objectives, and ensuring that staff have the right mix of skills and expertise. Each of these areas experienced a marked improvement between 2013 and 2017, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Changes in Staffing and Budgets for Policy Work at Regional PSOs

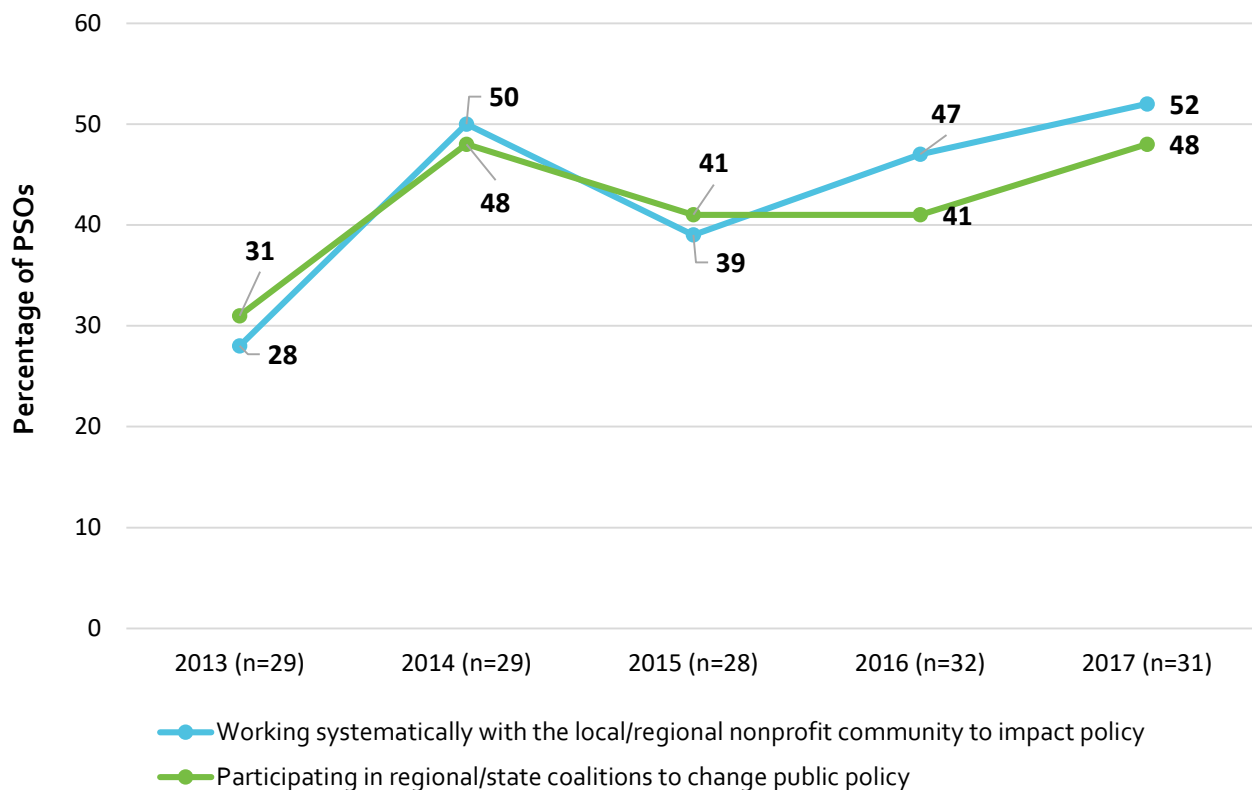


More regional PSOs are collaborating with other organizations to influence policy at the local or regional level.

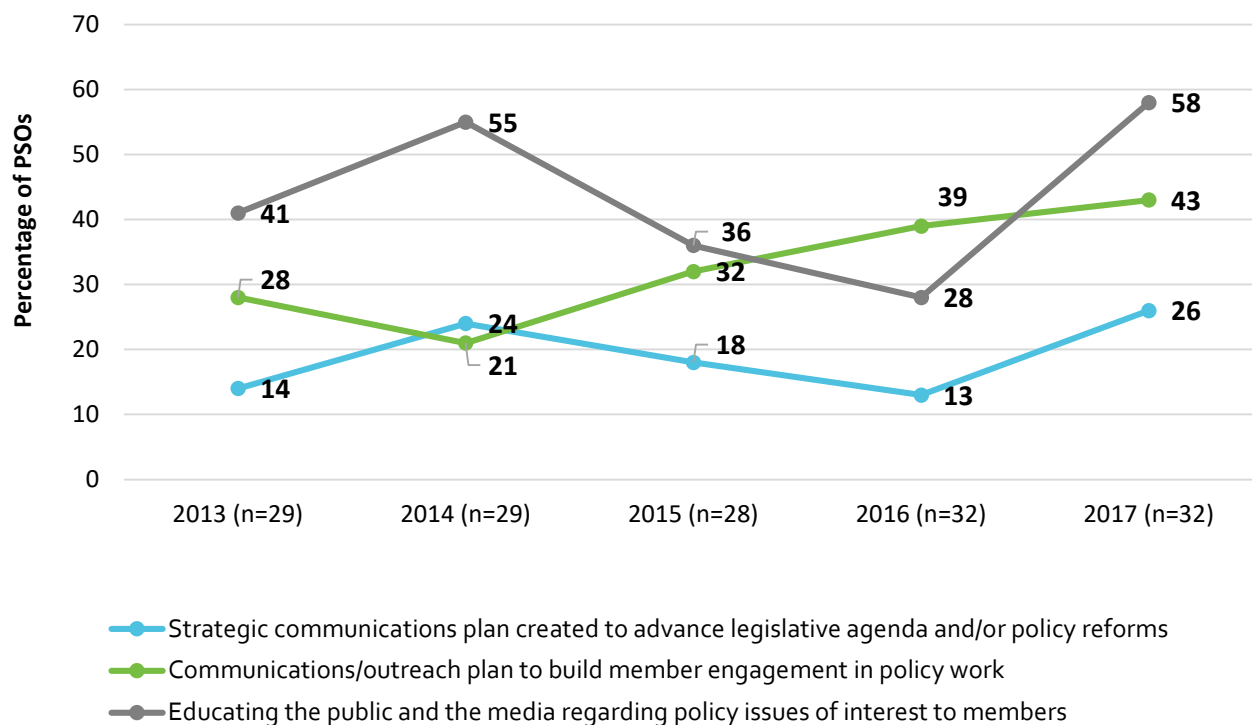
This trend is shown in Figure 9. Overall, there has been a steady increase since 2015 in the share of PSOs working systematically with the local or regional nonprofit community to impact policy and in the share participating in regional/state coalitions. Regional PSOs have consistently interacted to some extent with the nonprofit community to deliver education programs or other activities over time, but the notable change is specifically that more of the partnerships are focusing directly on policy reforms.

There has been a recent surge in the development and use of strategic communications. As shown in Figure 10, the number of PSOs that have developed formal outreach plans to build member engagement in their policy work has steadily increased since 2014. Although fewer regional PSOs overall have developed a strategic communications plan for achieving policy reforms or advancing a legislative agenda, the share of organizations with such a plan in place doubled between 2016 and 2017, from 13% to 26%. There was also a marked increase over the past year in the share of PSOs educating the public and the media regarding policy issues of interest to members, from 28% in 2016 to 58% in 2017.

Figure 9: Increased Collaboration for Policy Reform at the State and Local Levels

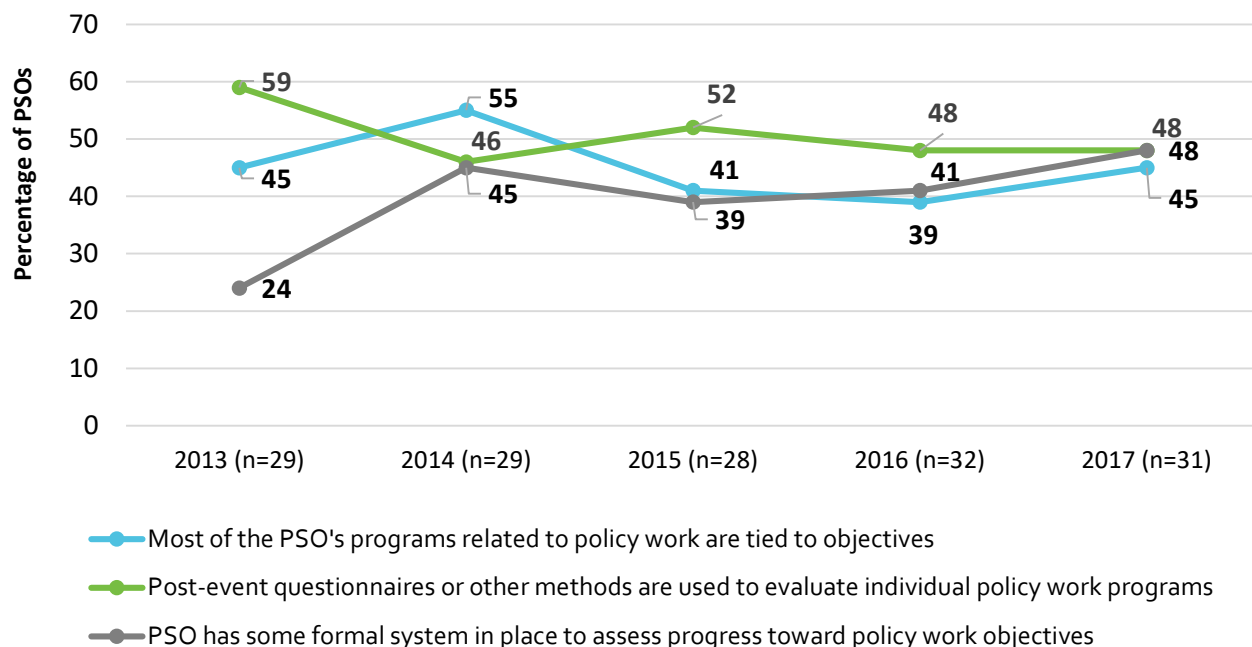


Forefront delegation from Illinois during Foundations on the Hill 2018

Figure 10: Changes in Communications Practices at Regional PSOs


Over the past year, the capacity of regional organizations to communicate with policymakers and other external stakeholders has increased across the Forum's network. More than two-thirds (69%) of regional PSOs in 2017 were prepared to communicate with key stakeholders (including policymakers) about selected policy issues as needed, compared with fewer than half (45%) in 2016. Moreover, more than three-quarters (79%) initiated communications or meetings with policymaker(s) to influence a specific policy objective, up from 69% in 2016. It is not yet clear whether these shifts reflect emerging long-term trends related to the capacity of PSOs for supporting and conducting policy work or whether they simply reflect an immediate, time-bound response to the current political environment and urgent issues facing PSOs and their members.

Practices related to the strategic planning and evaluation of policy work activities have remained fairly constant at regional PSOs over the past four years. As shown in Figure 11, only about half (48%) of regional PSOs reported having any system for assessing whether they are achieving their policy work objectives in 2017, and this status has remained relatively unchanged since 2014 (45%) when there was a sharp improvement from the previous year (24%).

Figure 11: Changes in Practices Related to Strategic Planning and Evaluation


About half of the PSOs (48%) in 2017 reported that their programming related to policy work was tied to overarching objectives. More than a third (39%) in 2017 reported that “individual programs related to policy work are provided mainly on an opportunistic basis with little relationship to each other” and this dynamic has changed very little over the past five years. In addition, only about half (48%) in 2017 used post-event questionnaires or other methods to evaluate individual policy work programs, and only 13% reported having a standard process and data system in place for evaluating policy work programs with key performance indicators.

However, more organizations have started measuring the outcomes and impact of their policy work since 2016. A new survey question added in 2016 to explore which evaluation methods are used by PSOs found that more than half (55%) did not formally track the results of policy work activities. In 2017, the share reporting that they did not use any methods fell to 45%, reflecting an increased use of evaluation across the network. The most common methods used by PSOs during 2017 included member surveys (39%) and meeting observations (14%).